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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to learn more about the moral development of Hawaiian children and adolescents and to assess if grade level (grade 5, 7, 9, or 11) or gender were related to the children's reported level of self-esteem. Eighty Hawaiian children and adolescents from low-to middle-income families were interviewed individually, asked to solve a moral dilemma, and administered the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI). The data did not support Gilligan's theory of moral development when used to explore this group of Hawaiian students, suggesting that Hawaiian children and youth are more similar than dissimilar in terms of their moral reasoning perspectives. Subjects did not manifest a global dichotomy in the way males and females conceptualized solutions to the ethical dilemma presented to them. Consistent with other research, there was a decrease in self-esteem scores among the seventh graders. In contrast to other research showing that females generally experienced a greater reduction in self-esteem than males and that the diminishment in their sense of self-esteem persisted throughout intermediate and secondary school years, the lower self-esteem scores reported by seventh-grade Hawaiian students in this study were not found to be gender-related (Contains 38 references.) (NB)

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Forgotten "Native Americans": A Study of the Psychological Development of Hawaiian Children

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Abstract

This article describes the results of a study conducted among an often forgotten group of "Native Americans." The researchers discuss the findings of an investigation designed to assess the moral development and self-esteem of Hawaiian elementary, intermediate, and secondary school-age students.

Forgotten "Native Americans": A Study of the Moral Development and Self-Esteem of Hawaiian Youth

Over the past decade, there has been an upsurge of interest regarding the psychological development and needs of Native American persons. This interest has resulted in an increase in the number of professional publications related to American Indian adults (Sage, 1991) and youth (Ashabranner, 1984; Herring, 1991). Researchers have studied a variety of issues among this group of persons that are of particular relevance for counseling and educational practice. These include investigations that focused on the effectiveness of American Indian adult education programs (Brod & McQuiston, 1983), the Native American youth drop-out problem (Chan & Osthimer, 1983; Eberhard, 1989), appropriate counseling intervention strategies for Native peoples (Herring, 1992; LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990), family structure (Herring, 1989), and the self-concept of Native American high school students (Heaps & Morrill, 1979) to name a few.

Clearly, this increased knowledge-base is useful to counselors and educators interested in learning about American Indians. By expanding their awareness and knowledge about persons from this and other cultural backgrounds, it is thought that these professionals will become better able to develop interventions which more

effectively meet the unique educational and mental health needs of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Despite these gains, there is another group of "Native people" who have received much less attention from individuals in the mental health and educational communities. This group involves the men, women, and children of Hawai'i. The cultural roots of this often forgotten group of Native People have been traced to an emigration from the Polynesian Islands several thousand years ago culminating in the great landfall discovery of Hawai'i around 1000 A.D. (Young, 1980). While it has been estimated that there are less than three thousand pure Hawaiians alive in the United States today (Young, 1980), many other persons who identify with the Hawaiian culture are offspring of inter-racial marriages. The most common combinations include Hawaiian-Caucasian and Hawaiian-Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Filipino) persons. In spite of this diversification, there has been a rejuvenated effort to revive an awareness and respect for the Hawaiian culture among the general public by many indigenous persons living in these Pacific Islands.

Having lived and worked in Hawaii for the past several years, the authors have had numerous opportunities to learn about many aspects of this group of Native Americans. As a result of these experiences, we have come to both marvel at and be humbled by the richness, depth, and beauty of many of the traditions and values that underlie the Hawaiian

culture. Collectively, these traditions and values create a moral ethos that is much different than most contemporary Anglo-American traditions but very similar to many traditional Native American values.

For instance, contemporary Anglo-American values tend to emphasize the subjugation of nature, competition with others, reliance on experts, and an analytic approach to problem-solving (Sue, 1981). In contrast, the moral ethos of the Hawaiian culture mirrors many of the values promoted by various American Indian tribes including the importance of being in harmony with nature, the need to cooperate with others, reliance on the extended family ("ohana"), and emphasizing a holistic approach to solving problems (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990).

Numerous multicultural counseling experts have emphasized that the type of cultural ethos in which a person grows up in, not only impacts his/her psychological development in many substantial ways, but represents an important consideration in planning the delivery of various types of counseling and educational services (Atkinson, Morten, Sue, 1979; Lee & Richardson, 1991; Pedersen, 1988). Given the importance of understanding the ways in which cultural values and traditions influence the process of human development, much research has been conducted on persons from different cultural, ethnic, and racial groups over the past two decades (Pedersen, Dragons, Lonner, & Trimble, 1976; Retish & Kavanaugh, 1992; Vacc, Wittmer, &

Devaney, 1988). In the past, these studies have primarily focused on "between-group" differences that distinguished persons from various cultural groups. More recently, however, investigators have been urged to redirect their efforts towards studying the types of "within-group" differences that exist among persons from the same cultural background (Casas, 1992; Sue, 1992).

With this backdrop in mind, the authors conducted the following investigation to study various aspects of the psychological development of Hawaiian children and youth. More specifically, recognizing the important role culture plays in terms of shaping one's development, we designed a study to investigate the "within-group" differences and/or similarities which might be found to exist regarding the moral development and self-esteem of a group of Hawaiian elementary, intermediate, and secondary students.

Moral Development During Childhood and Adolescence

One of the most important responsibilities adults have in life is to teach children and youth what is the "right" and "wrong" action in various situations. Helping youngsters gain an understanding of what is "right" and "wrong" in this regard is referred to as moral development.

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been a tremendous increase in the knowledge-base related to the development of moral reasoning abilities in childhood and adolescence. Much of this increased understanding has been tied to the empirical work of Lawrence Kohlberg (1969;

1981), Carol Gilligan (1982), and their associates.

Kohlberg (1981) noted that children and adolescents normally demonstrate greater complexity and sophistication in their moral reasoning abilities as they develop psychologically. In Kohlbergian terms, these changes are thought to evolve in a predictable manner as the process of moral development is described to emerge according to an invariant set of developmental stages.

Carol Gilligan's (1982) findings not only further expanded our understanding of moral development but stirred much controversy as well. Central to Gilligan's theory is the notion that a global dichotomy exists in the ways males and females solve ethical problems. In this regard, females were observed to demonstrate a proclivity for a what Gilligan refers to as a "caring perspective" in their approach to solving moral problems. Some of the distinguishing characteristics of this moral perspective include the tendency to emphasize connection, affiliation, and care for others in resolving moral dilemmas (Gilligan, Ward, & Taylor, 1988).

In contrast, males were observed to respond in a qualitatively different manner when presented with the same type of moral dilemmas as their female counterparts. That is, men and boys more often offered solutions that highlighted issues related to individuation, separation, and what has been referred to as a "justice" or "rights" perspective (Johnston, 1988). Although these gender-related

differences have primarily been reported from studies done among White, middle-class persons in the United States, few investigations have been conducted to test the validity of Gilligan's theory with persons from different cultural backgrounds. In fact, a review of the professional literature reveals that no research of this kind has been done among Hawaiian children or youth.

The Importance of Self-Esteem in Childhood and Adolescence

There is little doubt about the important role a child's level of self-esteem plays in his/her development. Clemes and Bean (1981) reported that children with high self-esteem act positively, are more likely to assume responsibility for their actions, tolerate stress well, feel able to influence their environments in positive ways, and express pride in the way they act. Frey and Carlock (1984) and Vernon (1990) also reported that persons with high self-esteem were more accepting of themselves and others, optimistic, confident, realistically oriented, and reported experiencing high levels of self-efficacy.

Children manifesting low levels of self-esteem were noted to be easily led by others, frustrated by stress in their lives, likely to blame others for their shortcomings, and generally avoided challenging or difficult situations (Clemes & Bean, 1981; Wiggins & Wiggins, 1992). In short, from the research that has been done in this area, it is reasonable to conclude that children and youth with high levels of self-esteem are much more likely to experience

heightened personal satisfaction in their lives in comparison to those youngsters manifesting low self-esteem.

Researchers have also studied the self-esteem of children and youth from different cultural and racial groups. Recent attention in this area has been directed towards investigating the relationship of children's self-esteem, racial background, and gender (Albert-Gillis & Connell, 1989; D'Andrea, Faulbert, & Locke, in review; Omizo & Omizo, 1989; Phillips, 1984; Spencer, 1988). The results of these studies often provide counseling and educational practitioners with useful information that may influence their perceptions of the students with whom they work. For instance, despite the hazards of growing up in a society which continues to exhibit gender bias and racial discrimination, it was interesting to note that African American girls reported higher levels of self-esteem from elementary school through secondary school while the self-esteem scores of White females were observed to decrease during the same developmental period (American Association of University Women, 1991).

The cross cultural research that has focused on self-esteem issues among children and youth does, however, reflect two major shortcomings. First, most of the research done in this area has primarily involved comparative "between-group" studies in which the self-esteem test scores of children from one cultural or racial group have been contrasted with the scores of youngsters from

another group. Typically, the normative group for comparison has consisted of children from White, middle class backgrounds. Second, while numerous self-esteem studies have been done among African American children and youth over the past two decades, a review of the literature indicates that much less research has been conducted among youngsters from other cultural and racial groups.

Given these shortcomings, as well as the paucity of cross cultural research involving Gilligan's theory of moral development that was mentioned above, the authors conducted the following study to serve a two-fold purpose. First, this investigation was designed to learn more about the moral development of Hawaiian children and youth. Second, the researchers sought to assess if the participants' grade level or gender was related to their reported level of self-esteem.

Method

Subjects

The subjects participating in this study involved eighty (80) Hawaiian children and adolescents from low- to middle-income families. All of the participants attended public schools on one of the most rural and less developed Hawaiian Islands called Molokai.

The students who took part in this study were volunteers from the fifth, seventh, ninth, and eleventh grades and ranged in age from 10 to 18 years. Ten (10) males and ten (10) females were selected from each of these

classes to participate in the study. The participants were recruited by one of the project's research assistants who spoke to the students in their classes after having received approval from the principals at the elementary, intermediate, and secondary schools in which the students attended.

Procedure

Having received parental permission to participate in the study, the students were interviewed individually at their respective schools. After briefly explaining the purpose of the study, the students were presented a moral dilemma which they were asked to solve. In order to standardize the presentation of the moral dilemma, the researchers presented the same ethical problem to each of the participants by reading one of Aesop's fables to them. The "The Porcupine and the Moles Fable" (see Figure 1) was read to each of the students. Next, the researcher asked a set of standard questions that were designed to measure one's moral reasoning ability. All of the interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by staff persons affiliated with the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Hawai'i.

This procedure represents a replication of moral development research conducted by Kay Johnston (1988). The authors followed Johnston's (1988) methodology in conducting the interviews and collecting data to assess if significant gender differences existed in the moral reasoning abilities

of the Hawaiian students taking part in this study. Using Gilligan's (1982) framework as a guide, the investigators were interested in finding out if there was a relationship between the Hawaiian students' gender and the type of moral perspective (i.e., caring vs. justice) they manifested in response to the fable.

Following Johnston's (1988) scoring format, the students' responses were coded into one of three possible response categories. One category included responses that emphasized concern about "justice," "fairness," and "rules" as a way to solve the dilemma in the fable. A second scoring category included those responses which represented what Gilligan (1982) and Johnston (1988) refer to as a "caring" orientation. Past studies have demonstrated that this perspective is typically associated with the way females generally tend to solve moral problems. In those instances in which a student's reaction included aspects of a "justice" and "caring" perspective, it was classified in the category listed as "both."

Two independent scorers were used to test the reliability of the scores obtained in the three categories listed above. This intercoder testing procedure resulted in a 95% agreement rate among the scorers in terms of the way they categorized the subjects' responses.

After completing these moral dilemma interviews, the researchers administered the Culture-Free Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) to all the students participating in the

study. The SEI is a self-report scale designed to measure individuals' perceptions of themselves (Battle, 1981). There are two different forms of this scale. Form A is used to measure the self-esteem of elementary and intermediate school-aged students. It consists of 60 statements which individuals are asked to read and circle the word "yes" if the statement is generally like them or "No" if the statement is generally not like them.

Form AD is used to measure the level of self-esteem among secondary school-aged students and adults. It consists of 40 items in which persons are given the same instructions as those mentioned for Form A. The SEI can be administered individually or in group settings. For the purposes of this study, the SEI was administered individually. It required about 15-20 minutes to administer and score this instrument for each student who participated in the investigation.

Both Forms A and AD contain three common subscales. These include the General Self-Esteem Subscale, the Social/Peer-Related Self-Esteem Subscale, and a "Lie" Subscale (which measures an individual's level of defensiveness) (Battle, 1981). Only the scores from the "General" and "Social/Peer-Related" Self-Esteem subscales were used in the analysis of this study.

The SEI has been found to be a reliable and valid measure of youngsters' self-esteem. Battle (1981) reported test-retest reliability coefficients for a total sample of

students to be .93 for males and .89 for females. Also, concurrent validity studies provided correlations which ranged from .71 to .80 for all students with values ranging from .71 to .80 for males and .72 to .84 for females.

Results

To ascertain if Gilligan's theory of moral development applied to the students taking part in this study, a Chi square statistical procedure was used to analyze the data obtained from the individual moral development interviews. More specifically, the investigators were interested in finding out if gender differences existed in the way the male and female participants solved the moral dilemma presented in "The Porcupine and the Moles Fable." Table 1 provides an overview of the results of the students' responses when asked to give the "best" solution to the problem between the porcupine and the moles.

Upon reviewing the results of the Hawaiian students' responses, the investigators made two observations. First, it was noted that the students manifested substantial variability in terms of the ways in which they responded to the problem presented in the fable. Second, as noted on Table 1, unlike the persons who participated in Gilligan's (1982) and Johnston's (1988) studies, there were no significant "within-group" differences among the males and females who took part in this study.

Please Insert
Table 1
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Tables 2 and 3 provide a summary of the results of the self-esteem test scores by gender and grade. As noted on Table 2, no significant differences were reported by the male and female students on either the General or Social/Peer-Related subscales. However, differences were reported by the Hawaiian students when their grade level was taken into consideration. Interestingly, the seventh grade students had significantly lower scores on both the General Self-esteem and Social/Peer-related Self-esteem subscales in comparison to the elementary and secondary school students.

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Table 2
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Table 3
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Discussion

Two notable findings emerged as a result of conducting this study. First, as noted on Table 1, the data did not support Gilligan's (1982) theory of moral development when used to explore this group of Hawaiian students. These findings suggested that the Hawaiian children and youth were more similar than dissimilar in terms of their moral

reasoning perspectives. Contrary to Gilligan's (1982) and Johnston's (1988) findings, the participants in this study did not manifest a global dichotomy in the way males and females conceptualized solutions to the ethical dilemma presented to them.

From a practitioners standpoint, counselors are cautioned about generalizing the notion that males and females possess different moral reasoning perspectives when working with youngsters from diverse cultural backgrounds. Beyond being cautioned about over-generalizing Gilligan's (1982) theory of moral development, counselors and educators are also encouraged to consider ways in which the Hawaiian culture promotes a more balanced approach to the way males and females go about solving moral problems. It is suggested that practitioners from the dominant Anglo-American culture might benefit from learning more about Hawaiian values and traditions in terms of understanding ways in which youngsters might develop a more caring and balanced moral orientation.

Second, the drop in self-esteem scores among the seventh grade students is consistent with other research findings. As Sprinthall and Collins (1988) pointed out, the shift from elementary school to junior high school is accompanied by a host of personal changes which typically become manifested in a sense of reduced self-esteem. These include changes in a youngsters' physical development,

shifting social demands, and moving to an unfamiliar school environment to mention a few.

In commenting on the impact of these changes, Simmons, Burgeson, and Reef (1987) encourage counselors to work towards building "arenas of comfort" within the school setting to help buffer the stress that children typically experience during this developmental phase. This may be achieved, in part, by creating peer counseling interventions at the intermediate school level, consulting with parents about those factors that contribute to changes in children's self-esteem, and collaborating with teachers about the ways in which the developmental changes of early adolescence is likely to impact students' self-perceptions.

Finally, while researchers have noted that females generally experience a greater reduction in self-esteem than males (Simmons, Burgeson, & Reef, 1987) and that the diminishment in their sense of self-esteem persists throughout the intermediate and secondary school years (American Association of University Women, 1991), such was not the case among the Hawaiian students who participated in this study. While the seventh graders reported significantly lower self-esteem scores than either their younger or older counterparts, these differences were not found to be gender-related in the present study.

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Table 1
Moral Perspective Reflected in the Responses to The Porcupine and the Moles Fable by Gender

	Females	Males
Justice Perspective	6	9
Care Perspective	30	29
Both	4	2

= 3.90, d.f. = 2, p= 0.80

Table 2
Self-Esteem Scores by Gender

Self-Esteem (N =)	Males (X) 40	Females (X) 40	F-score	p
General Self-Esteem Scores	52.15	49.78	1.05	.31
Social/Peer-related Self-Esteem Scores	51.44	51.59	.004	.92

Table 3
Self-Esteem Scores by Grade

Grades (N =)	5th (20)	7th (20)	9th (20)	11th (20)	F-score	p
General Self-Esteem Scores	51.95	45.95	50.90	54.95	2.80	.04*
Social/Peer Related Self-Esteem Scores	53.75	45.00	51.85	55.45	4.87	.004**

Please Note: * p<.05; ** p<.01.

Figure 1

The Porcupine and the Moles Fable

It was growing cold and the porcupine was looking for a home. He found a cave but saw that it was occupied by a family of moles.

"Would you mind if I share your home for the winter?" the porcupine asked the moles.

The generous moles consented and the porcupine moved in. But the cave was small and every time the moles moved around they were scratched by the porcupine's sharp quills.

The moles endured this discomfort as long as they could. Then at last they gathered enough courage to approach their visitor. "Please leave," they said, "and let us have our cave to ourselves once again."

"Oh no!" said the porcupine. This place suits me very well."